

Bowdoin College

## Bowdoin Digital Commons

---

Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and  
Reconciliation Commission: Focus Group  
Statements

Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth &  
Reconciliation Commission Archive

---

6-18-2014

### Statement gathered at Sipayik-Pleasant Point, Maine, June 18, 2014

TRC

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/maine-wabanaki-trc-group-statements>

---

#### Recommended Citation

TRC, "Statement gathered at Sipayik-Pleasant Point, Maine, June 18, 2014" (2014). *Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Focus Group Statements*. 8.  
<https://digitalcommons.bowdoin.edu/maine-wabanaki-trc-group-statements/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth & Reconciliation Commission Archive at Bowdoin Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Focus Group Statements by an authorized administrator of Bowdoin Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [mdoyle@bowdoin.edu](mailto:mdoyle@bowdoin.edu).



### **Focus Group – General Information**

**Community:** Sipayik – Pleasant Point

**Date:** June 18, 2014

**Moderator:** Rachel George

**Commissioner:** Gail Werrbach

**Topic:** Background History

### **Participants**

1. Brain Altvater Sr. (BA)
2. Dale Mitchell (DM)
3. Stephanie Bailey (SB)
4. Ed Basset (EB)

### **Transcribers Note:**

This recording has a great deal of background noise. At the request to best accommodate meeting with the elders, the group was held at the Elderly meal site. As a result, our recording caught a lot of the clean-up noise occurring in the background. This recording has been gone over for accuracy, but a note to listeners about the audio recording is important.

### **Recording**

**RG:** All right. So it is June 18th, 2014. We're here in Sipayik, Maine. The file number is FG-S-201406-001. My name is Rachel George. Would everyone mind stating their name please?

**BA:** Um, Brian Altvater Senior.

**DM:** Dale Mitchell.

**SB:** Stephanie Bailey.

**EB:** And Ed Basset.

**GW:** And Gail Werrbach

**RG:** Fantastic. Um, Brian have you been informed, understood and signed the consent form?

**BA:** Yes, I have.

**RG:** Dale, have you --

**DM:** Yes.

**SB:** Yes, I have as well.

**EB:** Yes, I have as well. Ed Basset.

**RG:** Fantastic. Um, and I have to let each of you know that if at any point during this discussion you indicate that there is a child or an elder in need of protection, or that there is imminent risk of serious bodily harm including, or death, to an identifiable person or group, including yourself, that that information may not be protected as confidential. Do you understand?

*(Several yesses).*

**RG:** All right, so this can sit in the middle. It's generally pretty good at picking up sound. Um, so before I start, does anybody have any questions?

**SB:** No.

**DM:** No.

**RG:** Ok. So I'll guess we'll just run through the questions one by one, beginning at the top. Um, what things do you think are important to teach Passamaquoddy children about their culture?

**BA:** I'd say the language, and respect of one another.

**SB:** Yea, I agree with Brian. I think the language is probably the most important right now, because we're down to like less than forty-five fluent speakers, I think, left in our communities combined. So, language is the most important.

**EB:** Same here with the language. And I was, I'm reminded of— that question reminds me of ah, the cultural values that the Passamaquoddy put together back in the mid '90s with the sheet of words in Passamaquoddy that were written down after having community meetings, and one of them is respect. *(Phone ringing)*. There's probably twenty or so different items that were identified as central values of the Passamaquoddy, when it comes to who we are and what we think is important, and I think those values really should be forefront, and uh... Elderly. The only— only other thing I would add is elderly. Respect needs to be given to the elderly as much as possible.

**BA:** And we need to take care of them too.



**EB:** Yes. Yea. That's really important. Cause they're the ones that hold the most, I don't know, uh, the culture in the most pristine state. They're the ones that are memory banks basically of our culture and if we don't respect them, then we don't respect our culture either.

**RG:** Can you elaborate a little bit more on what you mean, or what the central values are for Passamaquoddy people?

**EB:** Well, if I had the uh sheet in front of me I'd be able to, but what is had... one pager has a word in Passamaquoddy, and I don't even know what the word is for respect, but it's there. The definition. And then another word for truth. Another word for... ah, I don't know. I can't remember what they are.

**SB:** Yea, there's core values, you're right. I can't remember...

**DM:** (*Lots of background noise*). It's right in conjunction with um...White Bison, or the Passamaquoddy vision book?

**EB:** The vision book. Yea, the vision book. I don't know if that noise is effecting our... It's pretty loud.

**RG:** It is, yea.

**DM:** I've got a copy of that somewhere.

**EB:** They've got it at the tribal office somewhere.

**SB:** So we could get those to you. I could get those to you.

**RG:** That would be great. That would be really great.

**SB:** Yep.

**RG:** Uh, so thinking back to when you were a child, what were the most important lessons you were being taught by your parents and other adults in your community?

**BA:** You go first this time:

**EB:** Ok, well it goes back to respect, holy cow. You know, I can remember getting uh, a lot of uh, scoldings about being disrespectful. (00:05:00). And um, the way I behaved, I was— although I like to think I was a model child, (*laughs*) no ah.... Yea, respect. Most important lessons I was being taught? Was to be honest. To be honest. And I struggled with that one too. I did. I had a hard time with that one. So...



**SB:** I remember when I was little um, one thing that I was always taught too, or saw, like I used to see— they used to make boats down here on the shore and so there was always team work, I always saw people working together. So that's something that always stuck with me, that people were working together. (*Loud background noise*). Even sometimes when our elders would do something or somebody would do something wrong, like you would um— I had, there was a couple elders that come banging, knocking on our door to tell my grandfather he had done something wrong. Like, that's not what you do. So, for us to help each other, remind each other when we're not being mindful. Instead of talking about each other, like, they were upfront. I remember the elders doing that— coming and saying, "you shouldn't be doing that. You don't do that to your wife." Or, you know. So that was something that I took.

**GW:** And how would, how would people respond when you remember as a kid, how would people respond to elders saying...?

**SB:** They'd listen to each other! Yep. They'd listen. I don't remember— I remember, this... and it was couple old fellas that would come over and scolded my grandfather, and he listened to 'em, and he didn't say anything and then he went in his room and shut the door and he stayed in there for a long time, and then he come out, but he didn't say anything back, he just listened.

**DM:** I guess I have to say something contrary to child welfare, right. Back when I was a kid, you know, I mean it wasn't uncommon for somebody to -- some kid to be out on the street here doing something wrong and being corrected. Not just verbally corrected but actually getting a spanking from somebody who was not even a member of your family. You know? I mean, you paid -- if you went somewhere and you done something wrong there was a chance you was going to pay the price from somebody outside your family.

**BA:** Twice a lot of times.

**DM:** Yeah. Yeah, so it's a little contrary to child welfare in this context and this day and age, you know. You do that today? (*laughs*) And watch out, you know, I mean.

**SB:** Yea, it's true.

**DM:** Was it effective? Somewhat, I guess. (*laughs*) With me, I don't know.

**BA:** I would say that I remember one day us kids were like teasing a guy that was drunk and my mother got so upset with us, I mean she was really enraged, and she taught us that you don't disrespect anyone, even if they're intoxicated. And my gram, I never heard my gram say a bad word about anyone at any time, and anyone that come to her house, she'd feed them, you know, at least have a cup of tea and maybe a piece of pie or whatever she had available. So it was like, you know, you treated people like they were all your extended family. You know, the other thing was you didn't talk -- she told me you shouldn't say this about this individual because you don't know what they've been through. And so when she told me some of the things that some of these people I was talking about had been through, I thought different of them.



**RG:** What are some of the ways that life is different for children in your community today back from when you were growing up as a child?

**SB:** One of the things that I see is really different is kids aren't outside playing as much. I mean, I didn't have TV when my kids were growing up for a lot of years because I saw how they were getting stuck behind the TV. And even when I was little I was starting to do that too, watch a lot of TV. But we had to go out. We were kicked out, you got to go out. And I see that a lot of parents don't do that now. They use the television or video games or something as a babysitter. Like, it occupies their children. So I see a real lack of human interaction. That's one big thing that I see.

**DM:** I don't know if I can elaborate on that any more or not but, you know, it's very true that, you know, in today's age with electronics the way that they are and stuff, you know, it's pervasive everywhere that we look and people do have a tendency to utilize the electronic media as a babysitter. That's the nature of the beast, I guess, in today's day and age.

**BA:** I also agree with that but one thing I see is like there's this really nice housing complex and all the -- a lot of the elders are here but it's like we've lost that, I guess, dialogue and that constant, just living with them and being with them each and every day. And so we don't talk to them on a regular basis so a lot of that knowledge is kind of lost. It's not passed down. Because my grandmother lived right next door and I spent several hours there every day. My aunt over here is almost 88 years old and she gets very few visitors. So that interaction, I guess is the word I'm trying to use, I don't see the interaction between all of the wisdom keepers, the elders, and our younger generation.

**EB:** Four things come to mind, technology as like what Stephanie was talking about, changed life. A lot of rules now phase, compared to the way they used to be, a lot of new law, new changes, new regulation, new everything. The other one is opiate addiction within this community; it never was here before, which is a big problem. It's not just opiates though but hard drugs. And the lack of resources. Every day that goes by you get less and less resources in the bay, in the woods, and so that has an affect on our life. It may be even the reason why some kids aren't out there because, why go out there if there's nothing out there. So those four things come to mind.

**RG:** What would you say are the major reasons for those changes in your community?

**SB:** Well, I just want to say like with -- of course, technology is the major reason. You know, more flashing lights and stuff is real pleasing to the brain and the eye for any human being. But like with -- we've gone, we've been taught from living in extended families, like I grew up with my grandparents living in the home or our relatives, our elders would live right nearby us and so we were constantly engaging with our elders and hearing the language and hearing different stories and understanding how somebody come from or where they come from. And nowadays we're learning to live in a nuclear family. I know in this day, these times here there's

more nuclear family type structures than the other way, than we used to always live, and that's what we were always known for, was that extended family. So that whole perspective from going from extended families and just having the single-family dwellings. That wasn't our way. That was something that was --

**BA:** I know that -- you know, just real quick, is we had a full-time mother and a lot of the families don't have that now. You know, she did the discipline and she did the bookkeeping and all that other stuff and the cooking and all that. And, you know, a lot of kids only see their parents after work or after school and it has changed.

**SB:** Yeah.

**GW:** Because of why, Brian? Because of needing another job, because of -- what do you think why it's changed?

**BA:** I think the family structure is different. And, you know, when I was a kid it was pre-land claims. And now to get funding we have to fit into the mold of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Indian Health Service and stuff like that, and it's different than the way we grew up. So because we're conforming to their rules and regs it kind of has pulled us away from the way we grew up and the way we did things for, you know, at least when I was a child.

**GW:** Are those the examples, the rules and the regs that you were thinking of, Ed, when you mentioned -- you mentioned that there weren't all these rules, there weren't all these regulations.

**EB:** Well gov-, yeah, that's the same thing. I think the government has a tendency to become bigger and bigger all the time and had to create more rules for all these different things and, you know, back when I was a kid there may be times when certain things weren't illegal to do. And now you can barely walk on the beach sometimes without -- you pick up a rock you're violating a law, you know, if you take it off the beach. There's just things like that that sometimes you don't even know that you're breaking the law. You know. Things are different now, totally different.

**RG:** It's okay if you don't have anything else to add. When you were young what happened if parents were having a hard time taking care of their children? How were these child welfare concerns addressed?

**DM:** Well, the community was quite a bit smaller back then, you know. Today, here, you know half the people I don't know. You know. Back then everybody knew everybody. Everybody knew everybody else's business, and when people were having a hard time, sometimes depending on the family and depending on who was involved and stuff, you could settle -- you could find resolve within the family sometimes. But when you didn't, when you couldn't and there was an incident that happened that, you know, called for either law enforcement to get involved it was usually the state that got involved, and when the state got involved kids were usually shuffled off someplace else. It never happened in our family, you know, in our immediate family so to speak, but you saw enough of it and stuff to know that it wasn't always in the child's best interest. So I think it's based on, right now, the size of the



community, the awareness around what happened to kids back then, and the impacts that the kids suffered as a result of some of those things, and trying to come up with better alternatives today in this kind of a situation. Just talking about how we could probably better that forum.

**SB:** I just have to say, when I, you know when I was younger I can say specifically, you know, child welfare had already been set up and the land act -- the ICWA was already put in place. But I know just within my own family when we recognized that one of my siblings couldn't do her parenting duties, was unable to meet the needs of her children, we stepped in, and I remember my mother saying, you know, when they were younger, the grandparents would just take the children, and they would take care of the children. But because they had this other -- had to deal with other people, you had to go through a process. So, that's something that I remember my mother saying was different. But we were able to go in and we got the child through the kinship care, that was part of the, part of ICWA. So we were able to help raise my niece and we all helped do that and that was good. So that's something that I see; we were able to go as a family to the child welfare and say this is happening -- because my sister wouldn't let us take the child, actually. Back in the day you could just -- the family would help and just take care of them, but where my sister had resisted, we were able to take steps to help and bring the child into one of our family's care until my sister was -- but we had to prove there was jeopardy too, that was the other hard thing, and we had a hard time proving it but we did. It took us like a year. So that's one thing I have a real issue with, is the whole jeopardy thing, and just the time, I don't know. I could go on and on with the child welfare, but.

**BA:** Well, when I was a kid what I saw was if someone was displaced it was always the extended family that took care of the individual. There never seemed to be a problem as far as if somebody didn't have a place to go, where they were to go. The grandparents or a family member always stepped up. Sometimes in school, we'd be going to school with someone and then we're like where's so and so and then we find out later on that they were put into a foster home. And there were times where just -- there's a guy my age, well a little younger, and I just found out the other day, he -- I thought he went to Indian Township because sometimes, you know, people would go back and forth between the two reserves, but I just found out just a few months ago that he was put into foster care and I had no idea, so. And then the other thing was, you misbehave, and like Eddie I misbehaved a little when I was younger, there was always a threat of, we're going to send you away, we're going to send you to reform school or stuff like that. So there was always that threat hanging over your head, as far as my perspective went.

**EB:** Well, all I can tell you is what I experienced not living on the reservation is that as a child, I come to find out because I don't remember this, but when I was really little, extended family from the reservation would actually come to my house and live with me and babysit me while my parents were working. I don't know if there was any, what it says in the question having a hard time; I think the hard time was to actually keep the family, be present for the children while they're working so we had live-in babysitters. Also we took in a child from the

Res to live with us so, and I have no idea what the history was but we took in my second- third cousin to live with us for a few years so we were connected in that way too where children -- we helped other families out.

**RG:** Is the way the community addresses child welfare concerns different now and if so, how so?

**BA:** Like I said before, now there's so many laws and regulations. You've got to have certain licenses and certificates and all this other stuff, it gets really complicated, especially with those cases where the child has both the State and the Indian Child Welfare Act vying for the, I guess, custody of the child. So it's -- you almost have to be a lawyer to understand all of this and to me it's really confusing. And I think because we started later than a lot of the agencies I think, for the most part, I saw Child Welfare Department here at Pleasant Point trying to play catch up; that's how I looked at it. And because sometimes to me when you're trying to meet all of the criteria and the reporting requirements sometimes what gets lost is the care of the child and what's best for the child. And they used to think sticking a child in a home two hundred miles from the reserve was the best thing for the child but in a lot of cases it wasn't.

**DM:** I think sometimes when the kids were removed from (*Inaudible*) that they lost their identity to some extent. To be removed from family was one thing, to be removed from the community where, you know, where extended family was, is in some ways just stripping the child of who they really were.

**SB:** I'm just going to say this just makes me think of the jeopardy. I have a specific situation where another one of my nieces has been living in really hard circumstances for a lot of years and we were never able to prove jeopardy and because my sibling was not able to say what her needs were and to be real and admit that she could benefit from the help, she was hiding, you know, my niece and my nephew are suffering those consequences. And so it's not that we want to remove the children but where are services to help her say we know that something is wrong, because something is wrong and people know it, you know. We recognize it sometimes in our community with families but you don't know how to address it because there's all this paperwork and this process you have to go through. And so, in the meantime, you can't prove it, you've got a child who is suffering for years and years and years. I mean, we know kids that are being sexually molested to this day up at Township that nothing is being done because nobody can prove the child is in jeopardy. So we get children continue to living -- continue to live in, you know, horrible circumstances because of this process and the paperwork and we don't want to be real about knowing each other and knowing what's going on and just finding a mindful way to approach it, rather than go through all this tape and all that stuff.

**EB:** Well, what's different now, that I see, is that we have a tribal court, we have more of an internal decision-making, and it's kind of like an internal tribal matter now, but there's also difficulties associated with that, where at times the Child Welfare Department has a hard time finding foster homes so they need to reach out to people in the community. And, sometimes these children go to non-tribal, who might be, you know, still related to a tribal family through intermarriage, mixed marriages. And there's another element now that's coming to bear on the



whole child welfare concern is that some people do this for the money, they're a foster parent for the money and they don't care about the child so much. That's secondary. Money is primary. And that really is, really needs to stop.

**RG:** When you raised your children what was most important for them to learn, in terms of culture and traditions?

**DM:** Number one that they were loved. Two, that they were, you know, they had self worth.

**EB:** That may not have picked up the first thing you said..

**DM:** That they were loved. Loved, number one. You know, that they had self worth. And there were consequences to the things that they done wrong.

**SB:** I like what Dale said. That's what I, I mean I wanted them to learn language but I'm not a fluent speaker; I can understand more than I can speak. And so I did speak some of it, but just the love. And because we're in a time where we lose a lot of our people because of the generational trauma and the internalized oppression and, you know, that cycle of abuse and addiction that we have going on. And so, I was always afraid to lose my children to that so I tried to be present, as present as I could for them, and engage myself in either work or something that was positive to show them that you can make a difference in some way.

**DM:** I have to make a correction, I said were; are.

**SB:** What is that?

**EB:** They are loved.

**DM:** Are, not were. Are.

**BA:** I agree with both those statements. For me it was to make sure that they had a safe environment, that it was as healthy an environment that I could possibly give them, and that all of their basic needs were being met. And the other thing I think I tried to teach them is to accept yourself for the way you are. Because I remember one year my oldest son, when he was a kid he had light hair and he was a light complected, and my younger son is just the opposite, he's got dark eyes, brown hair, and brown skin. They were calling my younger son at a camp in the University of Maine in Orono, Puerto Rican and they didn't treat him very well and he was in high school. And they treated my older son fine. When they found out they were brothers, they treated both of them pretty shitty. But -- so I always try to tell them be accepting of who you are, you know, that you had no hand in -- you know, my wife is Italian and Passamaquoddy, I'm Passamaquoddy, German, Micmac, and God knows whatever, and that's who I am as a whole person, and I've got to accept myself as a whole person. So I always try to get them to look at things honestly and if they mess up, fess up, and then correct it. And



that's what I try to teach them as a parent.

**EB:** I would just say this is a tough question to answer because there's so many important things to learn, but the most important thing I can say right now is to respect your mother. That was a theme that I always had, especially for the boys.

**GW:** I like that one Ed.

**SB:** I do too.

**GW:** That's a good one.

**SB:** I agree.

**RG:** In 1978 the federal government passed the Indian Child Welfare Act. Thank you, Dale.

**DM:** I got to go.

**SB:** Ok. Thank you so much for sitting with us, Dale.

**GW:** Thank you for coming.

**DM:** I got some paper work I've got to get out.

**BA:** Do you want to answer this first before you lose?

**DM:** Huh?

**BA:** Do you want to do this one before you get take off the next question?

**DM:** I don't know if I have anything to --

**RG:** In 1978 the federal government passed the Indian Child Welfare Act to protect from the high numbers of Indian children that were taken away from their families and placed into non-native homes. Have you ever heard of this law?

**GW:** Or, maybe the -- I know you have to leave. We're sort of just trying to get at your impressions of the law and has it helped your community, what your sense is in terms of --

**DM:** I mean, I think trying to keep everything internal as much as possible and keep, you know, those children who are native intact with their culture and with some family members and stuff, I think is a very important part of it. Them pretty much the extent of my knowledge about the Indian Child Welfare Act, I've not really immersed myself in any of that, but I see that as probably one of the most important aspects of, you know, making sure that we deal with the issues here first and try to resolve whatever issues we can and to keep the child intact with the community and with other family members as much as possible.



**GW:** Is there anything that you wanted to, that you can add about the impact that you've seen for kids who were taken out of the community, what, if you, I mean, if you --

**DM:** There have been a few kids that I've seen. I mean, back when, as a young adult maybe, you know, I recall some of them coming back and struggling, you know, to I guess try to reconnect, maybe even being angry, being angry at the tribe, being angry at their parents, just being angry because they felt like they were abandoned somehow, and, you know, having somewhat a sense of hopelessness I think surrounding some of that. Aside from that, I don't know whether or not I can elaborate anymore.

**GW:** No, that's helpful. That's helpful.

**DM:** But that seemed to be one of the themes that I recall, that some of the people that I saw coming back from, kind of like they missed something. There's a part of their life that's, you know, there's a void there somehow.

**GW:** Thank you.

**SB:** Thank you so much. So I have heard of the Act and I -- I do think it --

*(Inaudible)*

**SB:** I agree with Dale. I think that it has helped our communities in some way that it gives us the opportunity to first say what's going to happen to our children. I think that's so important that we have that option because it helps protect our culture and our way of life. So I think it has helped in that way. I do know of some children who were taken away and I agree with Dale again, when they come back, they're angry. I know a woman who, even though she's come back, and had a hard time being welcomed in, that's something that really hurts her is she's not accepted as easily. It's hard to come back, especially when you are an adult. And so she, even though she sees how our relationships are strained, she says that she still wishes she grew up here and experienced it with, you know, the rest of the community because it would give her that sense of belonging and she longs for that belonging with our people and she has to fight for it. She has to try to find a way to come in and be of some worth now.

**BA:** All set Steph?

**SB:** Yeah.

**BA:** Yeah, I've heard of the law and has it helped the community? In some cases I think it's helped. And like Eddie was saying, there's times people take in children because it can be a meal ticket. And there are some cases where I've actually talked to people who've removed children and I says how can you put them in this home? And they says well, it's better than what they were in. And I'm like, that's not acceptable, I said, there should be a certain standard



for this, and it used to bother me. And sometimes the politics gets involved, which is unfortunate, because if somebody is doing their job within the Child Welfare Department and it impacts somebody who is in a powerful position, a tribal chief and stuff like that, they could, and they have, lost their jobs in the past. **36:39** And there's been many, many records lost of child sexual abuse and stuff like that by members of the governing body or the perpetrators, and they conveniently get misplaced or lost, so. And what I think of when that happens is that the poor individuals that have to endure this and live through this, they've gone through the process again the second time, that the first time being violated and the second time having to you know see counselors and make statements and all this other stuff, only to have it done away with is really -- and I see a lot of these people that have been through that turn to substance abuse and die a premature death and I've even seen some of them commit suicide. And the big question in my mind is could that have been prevented had they gotten the necessary help and support that they deserved? And the other thing -- I want to quote something that Deanna Francis (phonetic) said that really, you know, hit home with me. And that was there was a person that was taken away from Pleasant Point and they were put into a home and Deanna says, "We failed as a community to protect you, and we failed not only to protect you but we failed to stop the process. You belong down here and you never should have left home." And so I think sometimes, you know, when we say it's none of our business, I think it is our business. I think we can't turn our heads the other way and that it's our responsibility as a community to help that community member if they're in trouble. And I can't really tell you -- I see people that go away and they come back, they have nice clothes, they're clean, nice haircut and all that, but there seems to be something missing. There seems to be something missing, it's almost like they feel displaced, they feel like they don't belong, they feel abandoned, and it's almost like it was a nightmare out there. And if you ask them, at least the people I know, they all say the same thing; they miss their family, they miss their relatives, they miss their cousins, and this is where they wanted to be. They never wanted to leave. And so, you know, that's what I see.

**EB:** I have heard about the law and I say that it's a good thing, for the most part. Especially when I know of cases where in other states, even off the reservation, in Maine where if there's a child that's been identified as a Passamaquoddy the authorities notify the Passamaquoddy Child Welfare Department and we have the chance to become, in some way, involved in that child's disposition. The drawback to that is that there's not a lot of money associated with helping those children for those big cases and legal fees and travel and out-of-state costs. So it has helped to some degree. I know at least of one person that was taken away that did come back and has had problems with substance abuse trying to adjust and so that's about it.

I think it's a good thing to have the Child Welfare Act to protect the children, but we need to build the capacity within the tribe to make sure that it's carried out properly and we do justice to the children. Oh, and one other thing is that I've seen also an abuse, kind of like what Brian was talking about in a way, where there was a child that was not on the census but had Indian ancestry who was possibly being abused and rather than have the state come in and take the child, the tribal government, leaders, politicians got involved to change the internal tribal law to encompass more and more children, which would put this child who had Indian ancestry on the census, thereby protecting this child from any investigation that would look like there was -- the child was abused, and it becomes a tribal, an internal tribal matter. And this child was connected to a tribal chief who had a son who possibly was being --



**BA:** Implicated.

**EB:** -- investigated and all that. So they didn't want the state in the middle of it so they tried to put this person on the tribal census so the tribe could do it and then manipulate the tribal system so that the charges could be dropped. And I have no idea what happened in that case, but it was a travesty to see politics get to the point where it would protect a possible abuser rather than protect the child.

**BA:** You must have read my mind Eddie because I was just going to say that it has its limitations, Child Indian Welfare Act, because it's only those that are within the tribal role and role and then we're the only group of people, that I know of in the world, that has to prove their prove their ancestry and it is by blood quantum; you know, it has to be one quarter from a federally recognized tribe. And so I was just thinking in the terms of we have native people in our community that are 95% Native American but because they're not of Wabanaki ancestry they're not covered under the act in that instance, and because they're not on the census, even though they're 95% Native American, the Indian Child Welfare Act through the State of Maine doesn't cover that individual. I was thinking more in the terms of somebody that has lived with us, somebody that has grown up with us who just falls below that one quarter isn't considered a Native American, and so they don't get all of the things that we get here. And I think there's a sense of not being accepted, there's a sense of not belonging, even though they have to put up with everything we put up with, and do everything we did, and their families are pretty much the same as ours. I think that the drawback and the limitations of that law is they're one of the of the individuals that fall through the crack. So all of the services that they should be, I guess, I guess, entitled to or eligible for, they're not, so they have to live with us and they're our our friends and stuff but they're not covered under this law. So they're one of the individuals individuals that fall through the crack.

**EB:** They're relatives.

**BA:** Yeah, so that's -- I think that's where the law fails.

**GW:** People have also mentioned the fights between the courts too when the child -- like what you were talking about Brian, when the child doesn't meet the blood quantum but you have one parent wanting to go through the tribal court, who is on the census, and the other parent who's non-native who is going through the -- I mean we have heard some about those kids as well and the challenges in terms of how to do what's best for that child and the fight between the courts, it sounds like.

**SB:** Yeah, I'm advocating for a family right now where the mother is on our tribal census and her mate is not and so their children don't make the census but the -- we've been meeting with the Child Welfare Department here and then dealing with the state and, let me tell you, it's a real mess. And the way the state like is very inappropriate, in this case, they're very inappropriate with what they're doing to this family. It's gone in like a really weird direction

and everything. I'm trying to get this family to give a statement too.

**RG:** How would you describe the relationship between the tribe and the State of Maine? Is it different now than it was and, if so, how so?

**GW:** I don't know if we have enough time for --

**BA:** I'm just going to say --

**GW:** I'm sorry, I know this is --

**BA:** -- terrible, terrible, terrible. They've never treated us very well, I don't envision that they ever will, and it's more than just about racism. I think it has a lot to do with -- even though we have some highly educated people in our community, it's almost like they don't value those opinions like they would their colleagues, and it's almost like they think we're less than. And just take a look at the Doctrine of Discovery, I mean, you've got a bunch of religious people coming in and saying this land is ours, we're going to convert every one to have them become Christians, and we had our religion tens of thousands of years. And so -- and you say, you know, it's a redneck attitude but if you look at it, judges and lawyers and highly educated people within the Maine system look at tribal people like that. I mean, it's like, when I was a kid it was like, you know, I had some people call me German. You know, you're from Germany, you're Hitler, this and that, and I go to Eastport and they say get back to the reservation you dirty little Indian. So those are the things you hear growing up. And I just think that we're never going to be a partner with the state. We're never going to be equal to the state. The state of Maine treats Native people the worst, by far, of all the other 49 states, it's been proven; it's been documented. And, you know, because you know certain things are law, they just says okay, we have to do this to meet the federal requirements and -- but I just don't -- I think it's terrible between the state. The only difference now is before we were wards of the state and now they think we get everything for nothing from the federal government. That's how I think things are different. And, you know, I've worked for a lot of departments and I just don't think it's going to change, and I don't think it's good, I don't think it's healthy, and -- you know, and the intent isn't there either. They'll tell you the intent is there and then when it comes down to coming with an agreement with the state they pull the plug. You know, so I just think it's terrible, I've always thought it was terrible, and I don't think I'll ever see that change in my lifetime.

**SB:** Yeah, I just think the state is untrustworthy. I don't think that they're honorable when it comes to decisions with us. Their intent in the beginning was to get us under their thumb before when we were -- you know, when we still had a lot of claim to the land. And so now we're at a place where there's not a lot of education on where and how we got to be where we're at today, so it's easy for them to get this bully stance and get a lot of the other people, the citizens of Maine, to see us as less than because our history is hidden from -- you know, when people see us, Oh, they get everything. They get this, they get that, but they don't realize how much we've given up to even getting what we've gotten. And we didn't even anticipate it to be as bad as it is because we were lied to. We were lied to so that they could get what they wanted. So, yeah, I don't see that improving until we become self-reliant and then just maybe



friends.

**EB:** This is a complicated subject matter that could take all day to talk about but I would try to narrow it down to a few things. We talk as if the state is one individual; it's not. I think we have to recognize that the state is a collective but it's set up under a certain system that is clashing with the cultural values of the Passamaquoddy. We are a collective also. We don't all agree. We have our debates. We have our roles. We have all our fights and internal struggles to try to come up with a certain amount of consensus and direction and that consensus that we would develop oftentimes clashes with the state's consensus. I don't think it's an impossible situation but I think, thinking back in time, the -- part of your question is describing the relationship between the State of Maine is it different than it was and how so? It was really, really bad. We have court language, the state -- I think the Supreme Court that calls Passamaquoddy's imbeciles. If that happened today, I don't think the state, the collectives, the people of the State of Maine would not care much for that language. So I think things have changed a little bit, becoming more politically correct and more racially sensitive, the people of people of the State of Maine. I think, for the most part, most of the people on the lower levels, levels, not the politicians, really are not as bad as they used to be. In the old days there was the was the Indian and Settler wars, French and English whatever, French and Indian wars. It was It was bad. You could get killed. I remember a story my grandfather told me about that clash that clash of values where him and his buddies were playing on the old toll bridge and some some people from -- non-Indians came by and threw his buddy over the bridge and he drowned. It was like nothing ever happened to them; nothing ever did happen as far as consequences. So if that happened today, I don't know maybe it still could, but I don't see it see it happening so easily. I hope that someday that we will be able to have good state tribal relations and that the clash between the two sovereigns will end, there will be good understanding; because that's what it is, it's a clash of culture, a clash of values, and a clash of sovereignty. That clash is going on between the feds and the state too, so, I mean, nobody wants to give up their sovereignty. I hear that all the time. Each sovereign wants to maintain their integrity. So that's about all I have to say on that one.

**RG:** What do you remember about the Indian Agent? What was his role and what was the relationship like between the Indian Agent and community members?

**EB:** I don't remember a whole lot about the Indian Agent, except what people told me, but I did have a few interactions with the Indian Agent. As a young adult I had to go to the Indian Agent for supplies to be able to help me fix a house, for food orders, and it felt really -- I don't know what the word is.

**BA:** Degrading?

**EB:** Humiliating, yeah. Because I was, I was, you know, asked a lot of questions. You know, 'what do you want that for? You sure?' And all this stuff. She was not that bad of a person, it was towards the end of her tenure, and it was the last Indian Agent that we had. But my -- the

role was to, you know, basically do that, to help, but at the same time, you know, people were almost having to beg for help. And I heard nothing but bad stories about the Indian Agent from other people's experience. But my experience was, it was confirmed, you know, and I heard that, I was somewhat humiliated, and -- but I needed what I needed and I couldn't get by without it.

**SB:** I was a real small girl when they were here and I just remember going to get food with one of my family members so I never engaged with them or talked to them. But I just remember it was somebody that people in our community went to, to get food or supplies.

**BA:** Yeah, I remember the Indian Agent, his name was Hiram Hall, his assistant was Reggie Johnson (phonetic). Reggie Johnson was the last Indian Agent we had and she was also the JP. She came to my wedding drunk, she married my wife and I, she only charged me a kiss for the ceremony, and she died on my birthday. So the role, I think the role of the Indian Agent was to give out food orders so we used to get (*Inaudible*) food and help and (*Inaudible*) real need. And the funny thing was assisting people within the community it was our own money. It was a result of them cutting wood up on Indian Township and the stumpage that went with that so they acted like they were doing everyone a favor but it was ours anyway. And the other thing that was odd was my uncle, who is now deceased, went up to Hiram Hall's house when we wasn't home, broke in his house, and he had these two refrigerator or freezers full of meat that were purchased supposedly for community members but they never got it so he took all of that stuff and he delivered it to everyone on the reservation.

**GW:** Wow, Robin Hood.

**BA:** Yeah, and so that's what I remember of the Indian Agent. And my dad was always an excellent provider so he never had to go to the Indian Agent but there was always this joke of the older people going around about how you have to go see Hiram Hall if you needed anything and stuff. And there was this older gentleman who went up to him and cussed him out and, you know, he had to blow his nose and he blew his nose on the table and said that's what he thought of the Indian Agent and he walked away. So, like Eddie said, there was, you know, some people that felt humiliated and degraded and like they had to beg. And what's kind of ironic is later on people found out it was their money anyway, you know, but they were acting like we're helping the poor Indians. So that's what I remember of him.

**RG:** What was the role of the church when you were young, is it different now than it was, how so? Another loaded topic.

**BA:** Well, there were, they called them, sisters of mercy in the schools when I was a kid here. Some of them could be quite cruel. I used to get spanked and smacked around all the time. And I didn't like turning my palms face up so I put -- I showed my knuckles but that wouldn't stop them from smacking them with the pointers and stuff. And later on, after my parents found out I was acting up in school, I'd get spanked when I'd go home. But... we had to do certain things, go to church -- I was an altar boy at one time, believe it or not -- and we would, you know -- to me it was like the Catholic Church was like, I viewed it as a punitive sort of system, if you didn't do this and this and that you'd go to hell, stuff like that, but they scared us as kids. As a small child I was scared so, you know, you did things so you wouldn't burn in



hell and all that other stuff and -- but the thing that I find as I grow older in life is I find out that they ostracized the medicine people, you know, the people that really helped our community and they made it sound like they worshiped the devil and stuff like this because they did other ceremonies and carried other medicines. And that was a thing that really bothered me and I don't -- even though I was baptized, I don't consider myself a catholic, I haven't for decades. And I think the church had to have more of an open mind because when I was a kid, even though we had probably half the people they got now, that church was full every Sunday. That church was full. Now the only times it's full is during weddings, if they choose to get married in the church -- there's a lot of weddings that aren't in the church, in a catholic church -- and funerals. And so I think they've had to be more open minded and flexible about things because they've lost probably, I'm just guessing, they probably lost over 90% of the people that used to attend church overall. And so that's what I see different now is that people don't go to church. And the other thing that gives the church a black eye is all of the pedophiles that were priests that abused our tribal members. So with all of that happening, the church doesn't have a very good record. And, you know, I remember once we had a tribal member commit suicide and, because the priest didn't allow it, they weren't allowed to have service, so the body wasn't even allowed in the church. And there were some priests that would point right out to somebody sitting in the crowd and ridicule and made fun of and ashamed in front the entire congregation. And so things like that just turned me off. And I used to tell my dad, because he cooked Sunday dinner every week, you're sending us to church, I said, how come you don't go? He said, oh, I went last night because they had church last night; he never went.

**SB:** When I was a little girl the church was still a big part of our community. I used to -- my parents made us go every Sunday and I was always told I was going to hell. Like, I grew up a really terrified child of God and the devil and so I believed I was going to hell my whole life, everything I did was wrong, oh my God, I was so scared. And I agree with Brian, I think a lot of things have tainted it. I don't know what it was but when I was little I would see the nuns, especially more engage our community and like a lot of us kids would go and visit with the nuns and we'd do crafts with them and stuff like that. Our church was run by the nuns when we were growing up and like Brian said I had a really mean one too, Sister Sylvia was mean, but for some reason they even stopped organizing any activities for kids. I don't know why the nuns did that but I remember I was young and it was big and then all of a sudden they stopped organizing anything and kept to themselves over in their rectory. And -- I was going to say something about that.

**GW:** Were they teaching in the schools?

**SB:** Yeah, they taught in the schools. We had Bible study and all that, all that stuff. I remember even one time I was a little girl and some -- a couple of elders come to our door and door and was -- and come with a nun and said the devil is walking around the reservation, he reservation, he has an overcoat on and his tail was -- they saw his tail dragging, like stuff like stuff like that, crazy stuff like that being said, stories coming, and it was from those really really hardcore church goers and so I remember being terrified to even look out the window,



window, like oh my God, the devil's going to see me. So -- and that's dwindled away. I know for me, I had too many questions and the nuns and the priest used to tell me you just need to have faith, like why do you have so many questions, you just need to believe. And Father Spencer (phonetic) was a real big one on to tell me, you know, I need to just stop and read the bible and the bible will answer all my questions; well, the bible didn't answer, it gave me more questions, and so I eventually separated. Like Brian, I was baptized and brought up, I used to say the rosary all the time and I would pray every night before I went to bed and kneel and I don't do that anymore, I saw past it. Actually two catholic nuns took me on my own spiritual journey, because I had so many questions, and then I seen I didn't need organized religion, that it was in my, so.

**GW:** Yeah, they told me I had too many questions too, Stephanie.

**SB:** Yeah. They don't like a lot of questions, just read the bible, be good.

**EB:** I'll have to ask a question of you, when you want an answer for this one, do you want my individual point of view or my experience or do you want stories that I've been told by my relatives about what happened to them, my elders?

**GW:** Both if you're willing to talk about both.

**EB:** Well, I'm willing to talk about what they went through because I think it's important to get a sense of this community, what this community had to endure.

**GW:** Right.

**EB:** But as far as my personal experience, I disavowed the Catholic Church a long time ago, it didn't do anything for me. I did stuff I shouldn't have done, I broke the statue.

**SB:** Oh, yeah, you did.

**BA:** I saw it. So did Didi. Didi and I went down to the shore and sat on the rocks.

**EB:** You saw what?

*(Inaudible)*

**GW:** You weren't the look out, Brian?

**BA:** No.

**GW:** Oh, okay.

**EB:** I will say up front that the church does, for the most part, good for people in a way that is good individually for their salvation, if that's what they need. But when you're taking the whole thing into context, especially what I'm about to tell you, I think it's really -- you probably already heard some of the horror stories. Well, in this case, one elder told me about



how his mother was considered a sinner and not allowed to be buried in the tribal cemetery so they buried her outside in unconsecrated ground and as a result, as a child when he had to go through that -- or a young adult, I can't remember how old he was when his mother died -- he got really mad and angry at the church and didn't go to the church for the longest time because he couldn't understand why his mother was, you know, pushed outside of the community cemetery.

The other one was my great grandmother required to kneel in the foyer of the church because she got pregnant before she got married and be humiliated every Sunday morning as people, parishioners would go in and out of the church, was not allowed to go inside the church because she was not holy or she was less than or whatever the punishment was for somebody who's pregnant out of wedlock. So that kind of turned I think sour some of the family members against the church too.

And in my experience when I was just moving back to the community after living away being raised in the suburbs of Boston area, I wanted to come back to my father's homeland and learn more about his culture and one of the first things we did was set up sweat lodges; there was a whole resurgence of reclaiming our culture through the use of sweat lodges and there was several sweat lodges in the community. And the word was put out by the elder parishioners from this community to go burn the sweat lodges, destroy them because that's the work of the devil. And one day we had several sweat lodges out there, the next day they were all burnt, and I know who did it. It was my best friend that did it, he was carrying out the will of the elders at the time we were devout Catholics. He was probably drunk when he did it too. So I see that now, what's different now the church and the parishioners have accepted sweat lodges, accepted and embraced the culture (*Inaudible*) they even bring smudging into the church, they do things totally different. The church doesn't have the kind of grip it had at one time.

**BA:** Singing and drumming. They allow that in the church.

**EB:** Everything is totally different. The actual teachings are not, but the changes (*Inaudible*) on the ground, for example, they never used to let somebody who's cremated let the ashes come into the church because you have to have a body when you're buried otherwise you can't be saved, you know, it's past of the scriptures; you have to be intact to be saved and resurrected on the final days, whenever that happens. But -- so yeah, it's changed. The church doesn't have the grip it used to and I see that as a positive thing and I see that the resurgence of spirituality and cultural connection is really taking a deep strong hold in our community and able to live well with the other religions, whatever they are, and not fight like we used to. I don't see the fight; I don't see that struggle anymore.

**SB:** I agree.

**RG:** Whether you lived here your whole life or have been away and come back, how has where you lived throughout your life affected your sense of belonging and identity?



**EB:** Want me to go?

**SB:** Yeah.

**EB:** I have not lived here my whole life. The sense of belonging was a real big issue for me when I was young. Then sometimes I get little pangs or whatever well up inside of me about some of those, that baggage that I used to carry, so it tells me that I haven't really fully integrated it all in my life, you know. It usually happens when someone makes comments about my appearance, more so than anything else, or my attitude is not the same as people from here, or something like that. But, you know, I don't think that I see that so much anymore because -- and I saw this real early in life, is that you know being maybe one of two only redheads in the whole community back then, you know, now you look around and you see blonde hair, red hair, you know, all colored hair, purple hair now.

**GW:** Yeah, that's right.

**EB:** And so every family has to be more accepting about the changes and the mixed-blood appearance of people but that did have a real big impact on my younger years about my sense of identity and I had to struggle with that in early years to try to figure out who I was. And that is not just here, about my sense of belonging, my sense of belonging had to do with wherever I went because Brian talked about a story where his son was -- one of them was accepted when he went to camp and the other one wasn't based on the appearance, but when they found out that they were both Passamaquoddy they were both shunned. I had that same thing happen to me in the city where, oh, boy I'm having fun with all my friends in high school, whatever, and then as soon as they find out my father's Passamaquoddy, whoa, wooo wooo woo wooo. Pass me a quarter, stuff like that. Very disrespectful. And I soon and quickly found out who my real friends at that young age. So I used to -- I loved coming here when I was little, my father would be bringing me here, the whole family in the car and stuff, and I'd be so happy to get here. As soon as we turned down Route 190 and I saw Chris Altvater's house, I started to get this real gut-wrenching feeling of fear about not being accepted. That the dark-skinned people that I didn't know was going to tease me more, but you know what, I'm ready for you, whatever you're going to dish out, I'm ready because I know who I am. And I started to feel that early on in age and I had to really, at 10 years old, try to go up against 30-40 year-old people, 50-year-old people calling me a little white boy and all that, being kind of mean about it, and I had to, you know, engage with them and struggle with them and it taught me some lessons, I guess, because I don't give up that easily. So maybe that was a good thing for me, I don't know. Did I answer your question?

**GW:** Yeah.

**SB:** I've lived on the -- I'm a -- I call myself a real res girl because I grew up here first when I was young and then I went to Township. And when I went away to high school I went to a private school and so I went away, you know, around rich kids that were nowhere near our reservation so when I'd come back I didn't have any relationships with Eastport or Perry kids or Robbinston or Calais. Like, I know reservation people, that's who I know. I know people from Indian Island, so -- and I know some rich kids that live out in the world all over the place. But I felt like I really belonged when I was a little girl. I didn't have any problems in my



community until the 1980 Land Act came in and the Blood Quantum came in and my family was then attacked because my father had been adopted. We had -- you know, my father was trying to run a business here and they barred up his businesses with real bars, they barred up and locked his businesses. He was beat up; I watched him be beat up by an officer and I was in the truck. In front of us, he was beat up on my father's truck right in front of us kids because he was white. And we were chased as little kids and called little white bastards so I -- and then I realized that maybe I don't belong here because I was being told and being called names, even though my mother was full blooded by all their terms, they were focused on my father big time. Our mailbox was blown up. We had a bunch of things that had happened when I was a real little girl and this was all going through. So that affected my sense of belonging and then I felt like I didn't belong here and I always felt uncomfortable, like wondered who was going to call me a name. Or, you know, I'd be somewhere and somebody that my father, his family, the Bailey family, would say you're not my relative, you're not my cousin, you know, something like that, making sure that I knew that I didn't belong to that family.

So I -- and up at Township, because I grew up here, they always even still, especially now with the logging issues, you don't, you don't belong here, go back to Sipayik if you don't like the way things go. So belonging has always been an issue for me, but I do feel more like welcomed here. I feel like Sipayik is my home. Because I also know that people have progressed and they recognize that the things that had been done to my father, a lot of the ones like Brian's age and Eddie's, they realize you know that they might not have participated in that but they also know it wasn't right so I have come to terms with that. And I also, like with Eddie I agree, I think it's helped make me who I am today and why I have that fighting spirit and why I really help to try to give perspective, even if I'm sharing somebody's perspective that isn't well-accepted or liked it's helped me shape who I am as a person and the fight that I have in me today so I know I belong. I'm a res girl.

**BA:** I've been in Sipayik my whole life. I really haven't gone anywhere else, maybe to high school a little bit here and there but I've been here my whole life. And I used to wonder where I fit within the community and stuff like that. But it wasn't until I sobered up and I realized that I have to accept the things the way they are, not the way I want them, and once I was truthful and honest and accepting of the way things are, that the only responsibility I had to do was change myself and the way I looked at things, then things became a lot easier for me. And some of the things that bothered me was I went to Eastport in eighth grade and I went to school there for a couple years in high school before I went to another high school and the principal said -- when we had a school board meeting you know back in the early 80s it was like '81 -- he said Brian, I used to be your teacher, you know there's no racism, no one's prejudice in our school. I said, are you kidding me. And this is the principal and his son, who was in my grade, one day we went to play basketball in Eastport and there were three teams showing up and so he told me he said Brian, we're going to have to play this team. I said we've got three teams, let's do a round robin; I says we'll play for 20 minutes, go to 21, and the next team will play, and then whoever gets knocked out will sit down to the next round. He said no, I can't do that. He said, these guys pay taxes and I can't ask them to leave. I said, you know what Bobby,

you're an asshole, I said, and that's a racist comment. I said, all of the guys you've got on your team aren't even from Eastport, they're from Pembroke and Perry and the surrounding areas. I said, you know, we pay taxes too. And so -- but that's what we had to put up with.

So what I do now is, sometimes it angers me with what our community has to put up with but at the same time I try to educate other people away from our community what we're all about and what we've been through and so any chance I get to educate them on that area I will. So you know my sense of identity changed when I was 19. When I was 19 there were a lot of deaths in the community. As a matter of fact 1975, I lost a son in January of '75; I lost my uncle, he committed suicide; my aunt. There were just a lot of deaths family-wise that year. And I remember they buried my aunt on my dad's side in a cemetery in Perry and you had to walk a ways to get to where it was at. And I remember walking from her gravesite and I was the first one to walk from that and my grandmother was handicapped, she had a stroke, you know, just a couple years after I was born, and she couldn't walk and her left arm was, she didn't have use of her left arm, and she was sitting there and she smiled at me and she had gave me the same smile she gives me everyday she sees me. Here's her daughter being buried and right then and there I knew I was coming home and I knew I'd be here the rest of my life. So that was my sense of belonging, my sense of identity was even though my parents were born here and I was actually born in Eastport, I said this is where I'm going to live. So this was my sense of identity. And some people don't like me, some people don't accept me but that's life and that's life.

**RG:** All right, just a couple more questions. Maine Wabanaki REACH exploring traditional life, knowledge, practices, and rituals like those surrounding childbirth, puberty, and death? Can you recall any specific traditions, customs, or beliefs which may have been practiced around childbirth?

**BA:** I don't personally because, like I said, my parents, you know, they had a midwife and shortly -- probably, I don't know when, but probably 1950 on, right around that time, they starting utilizing the hospitals and children were born in the hospital and stuff like that, so. And that was right around the time they put a road through the reservation and right around the time that we started losing our language and there was a lot more influence from the outside because we were no longer isolated. So by the time I noticed what was going on, old enough to notice what was going on, we had adopted the way other towns were doing things as far as, you know, childbirth and stuff like that.

**GW:** Brian, was -- I don't know my geography, was Eastport an island where you go off on the causeway.

**BA:** They put a road through there in '55.

**GW:** Yeah.

**BA:** It was Moose Island and there was \_\_\_\_\_ Island and Pleasant Point was a peninsula.

**GW:** Okay.



**BA:** And they had the railroad going through here and they did, you know, have a passenger train and stuff like that but for the most part there was very little contact with people from the outside. And when they put that causeway in there, you know --

**GW:** Which was part of putting the road all the way in from Route 1.

**BA:** Yeah, right after that it was like things changed. Things changed a lot, big time. Like I said, from the language to, you name it. You know, where it would be probably be -- I don't know how many miles it is, I'm just guessing, it would probably be seven miles or so to get to Eastport back then, very few cars here so not many people went into town very often but now that there was a road going through there, you know, more people worked in Eastport and stuff like that. And of course that was around the time, and I don't know for sure but I'm just going by what I heard from my gram and my parents, that around that time alcoholism exploded in our reservation at that time.

**GW:** Access to it, yeah.

**BA:** They had access to things that they didn't have before.

**GW:** And the midwife you talked about would've been someone within the community.

**BA:** Yeah, there were several, several midwives in our community.

**SB:** And I really don't have anything to add to this part.

**EB:** This one here is really an interesting question. I struggle to try to find something to say. I can recall a tradition that was passed down to me that I applied to naming of a child being born, which I did to a child that we had a home. We wanted to have a home birth and I asked about naming. And so when you have a child, and I don't know if this is widely practiced within the community but I was told my an elder that when your child is born if you want to find a name you look in the surroundings where the child is born and you pick out something that is unique or brings your attention to that and you try to see if that name would fit that, whatever you see or hear or whatever it is that brings your attention. So as a result we named our third child (*Passamaquoddy*), which is misty little mountain, because as I looked out the window as she was born and outside and saw the mist and the Cobscook Bay and there's a little mountain across the bay from my house and you could see the very tip of it and you couldn't see the base of it and it's just so beautiful, calm day in August, that how she got her name. And it's not about childbirth, but I think it's important to know the context in which these things are done, you know. How do you know if that's an appropriate name to give your child? Is it a gut instinct, is it a gut feeling, is it something that tells you? So what we're talking about here is trying to be more sensitive to the ancient spirituality and that was in place still, even though the catholic religion had that dominance that were certain people that still hung on to that and they talked about it. And they talked about prophecy, the stories that they heard, they talked about

different things. I remember one elder told me, she said don't tell my daughter what I'm telling you, because her daughter was a strong catholic follower, but I'm going to tell you something that she's not going to like, it had to do with casting spells on people. There's ways to do it.

And so can you recall any specific traditions or customs or rituals around puberty? Yes, I had one elder tell me a long time ago fasting was a good ritual for young men to go out and find their way in the world, the spirit will help them. It was that simple, just at that time, fasting and go out in nature so do it in a respectful way and he gave me the instructions on how to do it.

Specific traditions, customs, and you know, death, yes. We had here an elder woman that I spoke to who was responsible when she was young to prepare those women that died to be buried. So it was her responsibility and just her responsibility to prepare the bodies to be buried. And there were supposed to be a man set aside in the community to do prep for the men and a woman would prep for the women who died, past on. She's the last one that I know of that did that. I don't know any of the men that did it, maybe Brian does. But that tradition around death is important to prepare the body and the interesting thing about that is she shared with me a story about her experience that every night when someone was going to die, the night before, she would have -- her spirit helper would come before her and tell her someone's going to die. And the next day, sure enough, be prepared, someone's going to die. Sure enough someone died the next day. And when she stopped doing that, she made a choice now I can't do this no more, that spirit helper stopped coming. She don't have that -- never had that happened to her again after she made a choice not to do it, when we started using funeral homes and stuff. So supposedly there's a man and a woman responsible for being messengers for that.

And have any thoughts or feelings about how these practices and rituals have changed? Yes. I think we should go back to that body preparation. There's been some interest on the part of a few people, women to do that because not everybody can afford \$5000 for a funeral home and all that stuff and we've been having some real negative stuff happen around the handling or mishandling of bodies at the (*Name Unclear*) Funeral Home where they hold the body hostage in the cooler before they even do anything with the body until they get their \$5000. To me that's wrong. And they kind of almost make you, pressure you to the point where you have to give, cough up that cash somehow before they even touch the body. So, you know, we can do funerals; the law actually allows it in Maine, and I think there's a good case for internal tribal matter to have our own way around this whole thing. If we have -- we have the graveyard, we have people that might be interested in doing this, a casket made out of cardboard or wood don't cost a whole lot. You can have a whole ceremony and a funeral for probably less than \$200. So if people wanted to do it it's actually a better way too, I think a better way to connect with your past, the one that has past on. The rituals are changing all the time, we're connecting I think more and more to the ancient spirituality and I think that's a good thing. So that's all I have to say about that.

**BA:** I didn't know of anything around puberty. Nobody ever said anything to me and I didn't hear a whole lot of elders talking about that, other than maybe having an elder telling you what you're going through and what to expect. I don't remember any rites of passage or anything like that.



Around death, I did hear some of the elders talking about they'd have to prepare the bodies and somebody would be responsible to do that, some may be responsible for digging the grave and they'd have usually a group of ladies that were responsible for cooking the meals, gathering the food and stuff, and they always had wakes. It was very, very uncommon when I was a kid to have someone's body at the funeral home. It was always on the reservation and there was always somebody there to sing a song in the language so they could pass on to the spirit world and I do remember that. And as a kid, I guess I've always been kind of nosy, inquisitive whatever you want to call it, so as a kid I was just little, I was just like --

**EB:** Not just as a kid.

**BA:** Hey. Six years old and I used to go to the wakes and stuff and the elders never told me I couldn't come in. I was always welcome in even though I was just a kid. They didn't say you need your mother or father or gram or whatever, they allowed me in, you know, and again just as long as you were respectful. As long as you were respectful and they might even have you do a few chores, things they needed done or they had to get a message to someone because there weren't many phones around here. And I do want to say something about, you know, some of our practices and that a lot of people, there's a strong influence of the church on our community and they had a lot to say about what was going on. And I've had people tell me they've never seen a sweat lodge, they've never been in a sweat lodge so to me that was the way it was but when we talked to some of the -- there's like 50,000 Micmacs in the Maritimes; they've always kept up their practices, some of the Ojibwe have kept up their practices, and they say that you've had the longest contact with Europeans of anybody in this country and they say it's surprising you guys even have tribal members left. And so their belief system and those practices are still there and so a lot of them, you know, have mentored and taught some of us and I think it's awesome to get speakers, whether it's Chief Oren Lyons or whomever. And the common thread I seen from people from northwest territories, Yukon, or wherever it may be, the belief system is almost identical and the way they view things is almost identical and they way they problem-solve is almost identical. So I look at that as this is what we're supposed to do. You talked about gut feeling, a feeling right, I remember after I was given the ability to give spirit names to people and I gave my grandson the name (*Passamaquoddy*) which is Little Hiding Bear, it fits him perfectly. It fits him perfectly. And what they all say is any answers you're looking for, just go out there, find a quiet place and observe the animals, and you'll get your answers. And so there's more accepting of the way we've lived for thousands of years. But the downside to that is you've got new age spiritualists who know just enough about our ways to try and copy them, mimic them, and they're getting hurt and they're getting people in trouble. And now everyone wants to be the Eagle Clan, everyone wants to be a healer, everyone wants to be a medicine man or a medicine woman, or have all these gifts that nobody else has and I'm really leery of them sorts of folks. And so I'm very careful as to who I tell that -- you know, I've been sober since 1982, you know, I'm a pipe carrier, I'm a sweat lodge keeper, I do this, I do that, because there are other people that want to take the information and the teachings you have and claim it for their own. So they're exploiting our spirituality, which is wrong. And it's even worse when it's done by people that aren't even



tribal members. But that's all I have on that.

**EB:** I've got one last thing. I just do want to mention, you mentioned new age. Our spiritual belief systems that we've been talking about here, we're struggling to try to reclaim them, regain them, bring them and embed them into our (Inaudible) now and it's not easy. And we're creating, I think, because we're so used to having rules, right, we're creating these rules around how you approach the sacred fire and rules around how you do this and do that all over the place and everyone's like. I remember sitting at the sacred fire one time as a fire keeper and some kid, a little kid, just walked in, he walked over the stones, didn't go in the doorway, and somebody else, an adult, hey get out of there, you're not supposed to do that, gave him hell. And I'm like holy cow, they don't need to do that. We're struggling with this kind of thing and I think eventually it will level out where everybody has a good understanding of what this is all about. Right now, we're still kind of going through some growing pains to recovery. So that's it.

**RG:** Is there anything you want to add, Stephanie?

**SB:** No. It was good -- I'm glad he brought it up because -- you know it's hard, but the death chant. We still have people in our community that do that and that gets passed on in the family. So, yeah, no. It was a good discussion.

**RG:** Thank you guys.

**GW:** Thank you very much.

**SB:** Yeah, thank you guys so much.

**GW:** Can I -- one final question because you all -- I know Dale had to leave, but you all were the first for us to actually use the list of questions and do this format. Do you have any comments or feedback for us about the questions or how we did this process or anything else that would help us for the future groups that we'd be doing?

**BA:** Can we see the results?

**GW:** Absolutely.

**BA:** Whenever they --

**RG:** Of course.

**BA:** What you guys --

**GW:** Absolutely.

**EB:** Only thought I had is are you going to type that stuff up?

**GW:** Well, we aren't but we have volunteers who will be transcribing.



**EB:** That's a lot.

**GW:** Yeah. Well, it's important.

**EB:** Especially from him.

**BA:** Hey, don't worry about.

**SB:** He's so mean.

**GW:** No, because it's important. We really -- you know, the commission's mandate is to ultimately make recommendations related to child welfare that will come back in the report to the tribes and to the state. But part of doing the groups and these questions is we feel like we're being -- we're asked to look at what's happened since 1978 with Indian Child Welfare but we can't understand what happened since 1978 if we also don't have some idea, some sense from people within the community, about the children, the community, the life prior to 1978. So that's -- we've been, to be honest, we've been making this up as we go because we're the first commission in the country to do this.

**BA:** You know what would be nice, and you're probably going to use this anyway, but you know it would be a good teaching tool to show a lot of the people that, even people on the state level, legislative level, that some of the things that are disclosed and talked about they probably have no idea of or don't have a clue. And like I said, like the -- one day somebody says so and so's an A-hole and when I told them how this individual grew up and what they went through and they really changed how they looked at that individual. You know a lot of people -- and unfortunately you've got a lot of people that don't know and don't care. But it's up to the policy makers and the lawmakers and all these other people that they should know this. And we were just talking the other day, and in that session it was touched upon, that they don't even teach accurate history of Native people in our own school systems. You know, it's like we know far more about George Washington and Jefferson and all these other people than they do about the tribes of Maine.

**GW:** Right, absolutely.

**BA:** You know. And there's a big, big imbalance there and it's like, again it's their rules and their standards and they're calling the shots and somehow or another that needs to be changed. That's why, you know, when I do sweats I've had people say why do you have non-tribal members in your sweat lodge. I said I didn't realize that sweats were just for native people and I thought it was a place to pray and stuff; I didn't realize that you had to be native to pray. But these individuals that come in go out and educate other people as to what it's all about. So to me it's a win-win situation; for one thing, you're praying and for the other things you're increasing your circle. You know, and again, what Chief Oren said when he was here, he said you need to talk to other tribes and you need to get this information that you're doing



something to save this river. You know, you're not just doing it within your own community; it needs to be worldwide, if need be, you know, that you're doing something to save that fish and to save that river. That's not still on, is it?

**EB:** Yeah, it is.

**BA:** Oh, man. I thought it was off.

**EB:** 1 hour, 48 minutes.

**SB:** Wow.

**EB:** That's a long time.

**GW:** It was, but very, very helpful. Thank you all for giving us the time, and thank you Stephanie for all your hard work.

**[END OF RECORDING]**